

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Retta Ward, Cabinet Secretary

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New Mexico's drug overdose death rate increases 20%

(Santa Fe)— According to mortality data for 2014 recently released by the Bureau of Vital Records and Health Statistics, New Mexico's drug-overdose death rate has increased 20% from 21.8 deaths per 100,000 population in 2013 to 26.2 in 2014. There were 536 drug overdose deaths of New Mexico residents in 2014 – the largest number on record - compared to 449 in 2013. National data for 2014 are not yet available. However, New Mexico's drug overdose death rate has been substantially higher than the national rate for many years, and had the third highest rate among states in 2013.

Overdose death rates from many types of drugs increased in 2014 compared to 2013. Deaths involving heroin, prescription opioids and methamphetamine all increased in 2014. Rates of deaths involving heroin or prescription opioids in 2014 were near the peak levels reached in 2008. While methamphetamine was involved in a smaller percent of deaths than heroin or prescription opioids, deaths involving methamphetamine have tripled since 2006.

New Mexico has been recognized as a leader in innovative policies addressing prescription drug overdose by being one of two states that has implemented 10 out 10 promising policies according to the Trust for America's Health. Additional interventions have recently been implemented to combat this increase:

- The Food and Drug Administration made it more difficult to obtain a commonly abused opioid, hydrocodone, by rescheduling to the more restrictive schedule 2 category,
- The Board of Pharmacy required pharmacies provide prescribing data to the Prescription Monitoring Program within one day instead of seven days, and
- The implementation by the Human Services Department of a public prescription drug safety campaign: “A Dose of Reality” (<http://www.nmprevention.org/Dose-of-Reality/Home.html>).

“The Department of Health and its partners have worked hard to reduce the toll of overdose death in New Mexico. The recent increase in deaths shows that there is still a great deal to do,” said Department of Health Secretary Retta Ward. “The Department will continue to work with our partners to address this issue.”

Prescription Monitoring Program

An important tool to increase patient safety around prescription opioids is the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP), which allows prescribers and pharmacists to check the prescription history of their patients. Licensing boards require that health care providers who prescribe drugs such as opioids to check the PMP for high risk patients and provide training on safe prescribing and PMP use. Unfortunately, the PMP is not used enough: of all patients who filled opioid prescriptions for three or more months in 2014, only 56% of patient records were checked even once in the PMP by a prescriber and only 49% were checked by a pharmacist. Requiring health care providers who prescribe opioids to check the PMP with every opioid prescription could help prevent overdose fatalities. The Department of Health is working with partners to increase PMP use, including partnering with the Board of Pharmacy to provide health care providers with a regular report of their prescribing and PMP use.

Naloxone

Another critical public health effort is to expand use of the drug naloxone (brand name Narcan) to reverse opioid overdoses. Any health care provider prescribing an opioid can also prescribe naloxone and New Mexico is unique in having legislation allowing pharmacists to prescribe naloxone to anyone at risk, or around people at risk, of overdosing with opioids. New Mexico pharmacies are beginning to stock naloxone, but only about 10% of pharmacies have dispensed naloxone kits and only 166 kits have been dispensed via Medicaid. Increasing the number of pharmacies dispensing naloxone, and of providers prescribing it is also a way of curtailing this epidemic. The Department of Health has been providing naloxone for free through its Harm Reduction Program for almost 15 years and has been expanding access in pharmacies since 2013. The Department of Health continues to work with key partners, including pharmacists and the Human Services Department, to reduce barriers to accessing naloxone.

For information on prescription opioid safety visit: <http://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ibeb/pos/>; for information on the DOH Harm Reduction Program visit: <http://nmhealth.org/about/phd/idb/hrp/>. You can also find New Mexico substance abuse data and statistics at: <http://nmhealth.org/about/erd/ibeb/sap/>